

FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

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DAGMAR WILSON INTERVIEWED

BETTY GROEBLI: I don't know whether our two guests today would be on the same side of the fence politically but it seems to me they probably are slightly on one side for Vietnam. Dagmar Wilson, and I -- have a difficulty time putting those two names together but that's the way it is, it's Dagmar Wilson.

I'd like to hear about your background. I think most people know that you are -- are you head of Strike for Peace, Woman's Strike for Peace? Is there a head of?

WILSON: The World leaders.

GROEBLI: Alright. What is your background Dagmar?

WILSON: Well, I was born in New York. My father was a journalist, a foreign correspondent, so we lived in London where I went to school and this is why I have this trans-Atlantic accent that some people regard as the accent of a foreigner who has no business meddling in American affairs, of course, I am American.

GROEBLI: Will you talk about your dad?

WILSON: Well, he was a pioneer in the early days of trans-Atlantic broadcasting. His name was Ceasar Searchinger (?) and he had a CBS program which was later taken over by Ed Morrow. He, of course, was the man who communicated with us during the war.

GROEBLI: Now, before we take a call, I'd like you to explain where your group was formed, why it was formed, what you're doing now, what you did in Hanoi, etc. very succinctly and then we'll take some phone calls.

WILSON: Well, Woman's Strike for Peace began in 1961 when the arms race was getting a bit too hot for us. It was called the Cold War but we were testing, nuclear testing, by the Soviet Union and by the USA was contaminating the world's atmosphere and woman began

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to be very fearful of an irreversible that was being created there which might really affect the future of our children, their health.

So, we decided to protest the arms race and appeal to the two leaders of the two big, big, big powers at that time, President Kennedy and Mr. Khrushchev. It was a completely nonpolitical organization and still is, nonorganization I should say because we have no structure, no formal structure. Once we had said our say, the women who had not found a means of channeling, communicating their concern before decided that this was a good thing and that we must keep it up. And that the women would insist on challenging the right of a nation, any nation or group of nations, to hold the power of life or death over people, just ordinary people like us.

Of course, when the Vietnam war began, we were being told that, you know, we had to contain communism that this was aggression from the north, that if we didn't fight the communists now we'd be fighting -- you know, over there, we'd be fighting them here. And this just didn't ring true to us. We just saw women and children again taking the rap, being bombed, having to hide out by day and work by night. And we decided to go and communicate with the Vietnamese women.

We did set up a meeting with a dozen women from the north and the south and a dozen women from our movement met them in Jakarta. And there we began to discuss the realities of the war from their point of view. This is the beginning of our relationship with the Vietnamese Woman's Union and this recent visit of mine to Hanoi was an invitation from them to continue our...

GROEBLI: Did you have to get clearance from our State Department?

MAC MCGARRY: How were you able to go there?

WILSON: I just went on a plane, bought a ticket.

GROEBLI: Did you have to get clearance from the State Department Dagmar?

WILSON: Well, some people do, I didn't. I don't really think that in a democratic society we should have the right to travel and we should have the right to choose our own friends. I don't want my government telling me whom I'm supposed to hate and whom I'm supposed to love. We went over there to talk to some women who we think we have something in common and so we went.

So far I haven't heard what the State Department's plans are for us and for all I know I may not hear.

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GROEBLI: Dagmar, you've been called all kinds of things and I suppose one of the things that people call you is a communist. How do you answer that?

WILSON: Well, that's absolutely silly and anyone who calls me a communist just doesn't know very much about communism. I don't think communists would be very flattered by this as a matter of fact. Anyhow, I don't think that the issues that we're facing are communism vs non-communism. It's a matter of survival in this world; we've got to live together and let's face it, it really isn't that. Because if our government would so intensely stay out of communism, or decided that we had to contain it, then we'd be fighting Russia I think. But you see, we've managed to get along very well there.

MCGARRY: Let me ask you Mrs. Wilson, you have described yourself as an American citizen, are you quoted correctly here in the paper the other day, 'Dagmar Wilson founder of the Woman's Strike who returned from two weeks in Hanoi on Tuesday told about 500 at the rally the morale of the North Vietnamese is absolutely suburb and I can understand why. You sit at a table at a dugout and hear the American planes and you want to get up and shoot them down yourself,' end quote.

First of all, were you quoted correctly?

WILSON: Yes.

MCGARRY: And you still describe yourself as an American citizen?

WILSON: I certainly do. I certainly do. In that moment was something that I would never want to repeat in my whole life. Here I was sitting with Vietnamese people who had welcomed these Americans, you know, very, very warmly. We spent a whole day together. We visited a Catholic Church which had been bombed innumerable times and half an hour after we left it, it was bombed again. And we were sitting in this dugout which was the meeting place, formerly a school house which had now been evacuated, meeting place of the commune chief.

So, at the end of this day we'd been given a tour and we'd seen some pathetic, tragic victims of the war and we were exchanging gifts, they were presenting us with baskets and in the middle of this kind friendly gesture, bingo that scream and that roar. We had to get under the table and there we were sitting with Vietnamese women and Vietnamese children as our bombs were dropping all around. It's a very ugly thing that we saw -- that I saw. In the window, it still disturbs me....

GROEBLI: If you had been on the other side, would you not have seen their planes and their bombs?

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WILSON: What planes and what bombs? For goodness sake! I mean this is a terrible....

(Confusion of voices)

WILSON: What?

MCGARRY: Have you been to South Vietnam?

WILSON: No, I haven't been to South Vietnam.

MCGARRY: Let's take a call. Good morning on the Capitol Tieline show, you're on the air. Go ahead with your question please.

FIRST WOMAN: Hello, I'd like to ask....

MCGARRY: Go ahead, please.

FIRST WOMAN: I'd like to ask this women -- this women, hwo dare shw come before us here in the United States when my -- people like my brother that was killed in Vietnam -- she has no business coming here telling us that we're bombing those poor people over there. What about our poor men who have been killed. Which, honey, if you want to feel sorry for somebody, you feel sorry for people like my brother who is defending our country, and all the free nations in this world. And we don't need people like you here.

WILSON: I feel deeply sorry for your brother and many others like them and we spake to some captive pilots in Hanoi and all they were asking us was when is this war going to end. Furthermore, I spoke to one who said that he'd never even read the Geneva Accords before he found himself in jail in Hanoi. And he said, you go home to America and see to it that every paper in the United States prints these Accords so that the people will understand that the Americans have no business in South Vietnam.

I think it's an absolutely criminal thing that men's lives -- American men's lives are being squandered in a country that has nothing -- has never done anything to us. We're murdering and we're sort of committing suicide at the same time. I'm just as sorry for the boys as I am for the Vietnamese women and children.

MCGARRY: Any further comments on that viewer? Than kyou for your call. Thank you very much. Good morning on the Capitol Tieline show, you're on the air.

FIRST MAN: I'm putting this in the form of a qestion. I will -- these are statements in the form of a question. I want to say that I support the President in his endeavors in Vietnam and

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I was wondering if you think that this war contrasts with previous wars in that there's -- there seems to be a lack of military objective and more -- and seems to be more emphasis on counting of dead bodies which sort of lends an immorality to it. And from this war point -- from this view point do you think that -- that it sort of has the atmosphere of -- of an unholy sort of thing and then I would like to end up by saying that I think that we each should support our country and our President in the present effort even though in specific things we might disagree.

MCGARRY: Thank you for your comment. Thank you very much. Do you have any further comment on that Mr. Childs, Mrs. Wilson?

WILSON: Well, on that unholiness of the war, yes, I certainly do. I think it is an utterly unholy war. We could not see that military targets were the objectives of our bombers. Of course, it's very hard to tell just how bombing is really conducted. But when your whole communities laid waste on an agricultural plane where you can see for miles and miles and there isn't a sign of a military objective you do wonder really what -- what it is that they're flattening this area for.

Make believe there was a little bridge here, a foot bridge, there was a little railway, one gauge -- a single track I mean. But the schools that were in that area had been bombed repeatedly, innumerable Catholic Churches in this particular province of Minh Dinh Dinh where 50 percent of the population is Catholic, they had been bombed again and again. Fortunately the people are adapting themselves to these conditions in the most ingenious way. They are dispersing all their centralized groups, all their centralized institutions so that after the first hit, you might say and the first loss of life, they manage to avoid any further incidents to some extent at least. But, I cannot see that we are really concentrating on military objectives. I don't know where they are.

GROEBLI: Dagmar, I asked you if you had been in South Vietnam and you answered with rather a laugh, of course you had not been in South Vietnam. Why have you not, of course, been in South Vietnam?

WILSON: Well, we have to define South Vietnam. I think that there are two parts of South Vietnam. There's a liberated area that belongs to what we choose to call the Viet Cong. Then there's Saigon and a lot of that is also liberated we understand from our Vietnamese friends. That is to say that there are 45 enclaves now where the South Vietnamese draft resistors hold up with the armaments that they have. We understand that they even send GI's holding up there too -- the objective is war and have to come to see it in a different light.

So, I don't really know what useful purpose could be served by us going to Saigon. We certainly get news from Saigon about Ky and his government and Johnson's policies and

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so on and so on. This other side of Saigon I doubt that we could see but we can certainly hear it from our South Vietnamese friends whom we met in North Vietnam.

(Confusion of voice)

CHILDS: Excuse me, could I ask Mrs. Wilson a question? You went to Hanoi, To North Vietnam, with very deep convictions, you spent two weeks there. Was it conceivable that anything you saw might have changed your mind Mrs. Wilson, or did you simply reinforce the convictions you went with? Now is....

WILSON: Yes.

CHILDS: ...a valid question as to the purpose of going either to South Vietnam or North Vietnam?

WILSON: Yes. But you see the thing is that we have never really understood a North and a South Vietnam. I mean we who have spoken to the women of North and South Vietnam. They say this is one country. Half the women that we met in Hanoi were from South Vietnam. Many of....

CHILDS: How did you know that?

WILSON: Well, how can one know anything.

CHILDS: Exactly, that was Governor Romney's point that he made rather belatedly.

WILSON: Well, let me say this. I think I know when I'm talking to an honest person. I mean I feel that you're sincere and there's no guarantee. I mean you may be saying everything that is not true as far as I am concerned. But I just have that feeling, you know, that you're -- I don't think there's any way you can judge. So, when I'm talking to friends in Vietnam, I think I know when I'm talking to someone who is communicating with me and not giving me a line. Furthermore, there is a slight difference in appearance between the South Vietnamese women and the North Vietnamese and they notice it too. They are quite proud of this, you know, this is their local part of the country. But they are absolutely united and determined to get the foreigners out of their country. They've been through this for centuries not only for the last twenty years. And this -- on this point you see they are absolutely solid. So, when we talk about North and South Vietnam, and as I say, there are as many southerners in the north as there are northerners in the south. Mr. Ky is from the North and Pham Von Dong is a Southern. So there we are. I think this has been a myth and I think as a matter of fact it's a lie. I don't think Mr. Rusk ever thought that the war was aggression from the North. This is just one of those lines we've been given and we're not containing aggression at all.

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The North Vietnamese are helping their brothers and sisters in the South.

CHILDS: I didn't mean to question your convictions at all outside a -- but I was simply questioning whether or not the venue of a brief sojourn could do more than reinforce those convictions. Now this may have been great value to you and -- and I see that you feel very personally....

WILSON: Yes.

CHILDS: But then you go to the question of -- of any objection judgment. Now, you didn't go there to make objective judgment.

WILSON: No, we didn't because you see, it's violence that we're opposed to, it's war as an extension of foreign policy, it's intervention by a powerful state in the affairs of a non-powerful state and it's punishment of citizens. I think that women and children for centuries, other citizens too have been deployed in enormous power struggles between nations.

MCGARRY: Mrs. Wilson, on your visit to Hanoi you saw some captured Americans. Would you describe where you saw -- what were the circumstances, how were they brought into you, whom were you with at the time?

WILSON: We requested to see the American pilots because we really wanted if possible to be able to bring back some word of assurance to their families. So we asked to see the people, if possible, who had not seen Americans before and whose families maybe didn't know if they were alive or dead. We were taken to a villa in Hanoi not very far from where we were staying which is the heart of the diplomatic area and I suppose securest part therefore of Hanoi from bombing. And the pilots were brought in to us except....

MCGARRY: Who was 'us' first of all?

WILSON: Oh, three women, myself and Liz Clark and Mary Clark all three from Woman's Strike for Peace. One from the West coast and two of us from the East Coast. So, we stopped and conversed in the presence of Vietnamese. The first thing, I already quoted the words of one of these pilots who had said, you know, our country's intrusion into this war is wrong because I have never had the information that I was given when I got here.

GROEBLI: I'll bet not.

WILSON: And he then, sit up and ask permission of the superiors to show us his

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quarters. He said, you know, believe me we are extremely well treated and considering the conditions we couldn't ask for anything more. We were given permission and he took us into his room which was quite spacious. As I say, it's in a village in Hanoi, it's not a formal jail of any kind. The room was, I guess, about 14 by 12 and very high but there's the hot climate and ceilings are tall and he had a bed very, very soft that we were told that this was exactly what the Vietnamese military officers sleep upon. He said that he gets two meals a day and it's more than he can eat and the only trouble there is, of course, boredom because there's not very much to do and not very much exercise.

So, he had no complaints and he wanted us to be sure to tell him family that he was Okay. Now, of course, we don't know for sure that they're all treated this way. But we also know, we do know this, that the pilots are a bit of a burden to the Vietnamese. They have to protect them from the air raids. So they are led down to the shelters three or four times a day just as we took to the shelter in the hotel where we were staying. And they also say we know that you Americans with your big phrase need more food than we do and....(Confusion of voices)....I know it may sound incredible....(Confusion of voices) The instruments of war are certainly not instruments of compassion. And I think the Vietnamese make this distinction too. We were extremely warmly greeted everywhere we went....

GROEBLI: Did you actually think Dagmar, that you would be under the circumstances?

WILSON: Well, what I'm really saying is that they also recognize that people are compassionate including American people. But that these instruments of war are the things that have to be abolished and that's what we think too.

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MCGARRY: Good morning you're on the Capitol Teline Show, you're on the air.

SECOND WOMAN: I would like to ask that woman, assuming that her ancestors were in the United States at the time of the American Revolution, if her ancestors provides a fresh horse and money to Benedict Arnold. Also, why does she not direct her misguided zeal by staying home and placing the blame for -- in this conflict in the lap of the man to whom it belongs, McNamara who never listens to any of his advisors and gets rid of anybody that knows what they're doing?

MCGARRY: Wow!

WILSON: Well, from the point of view of this woman, I regard the Vietnamese war as very, very similar to our Revolutionary War in this country. We were outsting an oppressor at that time, the British, and this is the way the Vietnamese feel about us in their country. Their constitution which Ho Chi Minh drew up even includes a part of our

Declaration of Independence. And I think that's a very interesting thing to observe.

So, we think in terms of containing communism but the Vietnamese are thinking in terms of having their own country to themselves. They have a tremendous amount of work to do to build it up to catch up with the more developed nations. Something that could not happen when they were living under French domination. And this is something that we have to realize when we try to understand that the determination of the Vietnamese people to hold out and win this war.

I'm not sure that I remember the second part of -- of

MCGARRY: Secretary McNamara.

WILSON: Oh, who never listens to any of his advisors. Well, I really have never been able to get inside the military mind. I try very, very hard to put myself in the position of other people in order to understand what motivates them and this was one reason we went to Vietnam to see what it's like when you are on the other side and why these people are so stubborn and won't give on -- in to our bullying and won't be bombed to the conference table which seems so unreasonable. So, I have, I think, understood why they are determined not to be bullied to the conference table. But I, for the life of me, cannot understand the motivation of the people that think that they can win a war by this means.

GROEBLI: What'd you mean 'accomplished' Dagmar. And I wonder maybe if this is the appropriate time to see some films of the Woman's Strike for Peace. Now, this was done when?

WILSON: What?

GROEBLI: The films that we have.

WILSON: Oh, yesterday?

GROEBLI: The film, I don't know what the film is. (Confusion of voices)

GROEBLI: Let's see what this group has been able to accomplish, if anything. Dagmar, what was that all about and what did you accomplish if anything?

WILSON: Well, this was not a very pretty picture if you ask me. There were about 800 women here in town taking a message to the President in a way that is traditionally accepted, freedom to petition and freedom to assemble in front of the White House to demonstrate the fact that we are opposed to this war and that we do not want our boys sent over there to be killed, or to kill. And what do we find? One hundred of us gets across to the White House sidewalk and they say that's enough. The rest of you can stay over here.

This is supposed to be a free country, we're supposed to be fighting for freedom in Vietnam. I can't understand this. We were confronted with hundreds of policemen. I don't know what they expected from us women but we were determined to go across just as we had always done in the past. So, in just pushing our way across, we were resisted and that noise that you heard was the protest of the women to -- against their police.

And I must say this, I never saw a single policeman in North Vietnam. They said we're sick of policemen, that's what we had when the French were here. I thought this was impossible. I said how can you keep order? They said, well, look at it. We're solid, we're unified. Everybody in this country carries a gun except the leaders; Ho Chi Minh and Pham Von Dong go everywhere unarmed. But citizens have guns because they have to defend themselves against the Americans. Very interesting.

So, I come back here and the first thing I'm confronted with is hundreds of cops when I want to present my message to my President.

GROEBLI: I know Marquis has something to say.

CHILDS: Yes, could I make a comment about this? We've had these demonstrations of the broadest kind and they seem to be getting a more, what shall I say, far out. The other day that dropping of leaflets down on the Senate floor. Now, I have a real question in my mind as to the value of these demonstrations. I would like to suggest that if you really want to influence American opinion and perhaps get a choice in the next election, the way to do it is through the elective process. That is very significant that in two -- the two largest states, New York and California, there is already a very important movement to substitute another candidate for President Johnson, to put in another delegation in the convention that goes to wherever the Democrats meet.

Now, it is spreading. I think this is the way to influence opinion and perhaps to bring an ebb to the war. And that is my question -- the serious question in my mind is whether or not demonstrations that result in just what we've just seen do not in fact create such antagonism that perhaps they defeat their own purpose. I wonder Mrs. Wilson.

WILSON: I know, many people wonder that. The fact is, you already referred to the last elections yourself. We voted for a man who was for peace and what did we get, we got war. I must say that I am very skeptical of sticking to the rules of the game because we have found that we have -- we have talked to our Congressmen, we continuously talk to our Congressmen. We've been in touch and they tell us things they make us -- make promises but nothing ever comes of it until we make a loud noise.

Now, I am not for making a loud noise and these demonstrations are incredibly difficult to organize. They're very, very strenuous. They take so much out of us so we have to go home and make it up to our families for weeks, you know, afterwards. We don't do

this for fun. But the fact remains that until the women to protest quite volubly, we didn't even begin to get a hope of a test ban treaty. And it was the publicity and the verciferousness of the women's appeal that finally made Dr. Dodd himself admit that because of the women's vote he was going to change his mind and that is how we got a test ban treaty.

CHILDS: Mrs. Wilson, I'd be interested in the form of communist Declaration of Independence might take that each individual is entitled to certain inalienable rights, life, liberty, pursuit of happiness. This, you say, can be structured in a communist country, this philosophy....incredible.

WILSON: I don't know very much about communism and all those things. But what I can see is in Vietnam a people who have a chance to run their own country for the very first time in living memory for many of them. And from the French domination many peasants starved although it's a very productive country and now they've doubled their rice production and the peasants are living well and they're still being able to send rice to South Vietnam.

The children who are not able to go to school are now all going to school and they've almost achieved 90 percent literacy whereas they had 90 percent illiteracy under the French. All people can now get medical care whereas before there were two hospitals in Hanoi this was under the French, one for the people who could afford to pay and one was a charity hospital and since most Vietnamese were very poor, that meant they had to get charitable help when they were sick. So now they are running their own country. They have their own school system. The children can learn their own language and be proud of their own heritage. This is what the Vietnamese regard as freedom.

As for the communists, I don't think this is very relevant. This is an economic thing. This isn't anything to do with I'll be free or not free....

MCGARRY: It isn't relevant the result of any man's labor would go to the state and this has no relevancy?

WILSON: It doesn't it goes to the people, you see the state is the people. Communism is an economic system just as capitalism is. You can have a dictatorial communism, you can have a dictatorial capitalism. Democracy can exist in both kinds of -- under both kinds of economic structure. I think we've gotten all hung up on this. We identify free enterprise with -- with democracy and this is a myth.

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MCGARRY: Marquis Childs, you had a....

CHILDS: I should like to say that Mrs. Wilson expressed great skepticism about the

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democratic procedures as having any bearing on the course of the war, the course of a possible peace. I'd like to say that I think these changes are taking place. Just the other day, you had a very significant change: You had, I think his name was Congressman O'Neill from Massachusetts, who has been a strong supporter of the Administration on the war, has now completely reversed his position. He believes that the war should be brought to an end by negotiation as quickly as possible.

Now, I think this is an evidence that opinion is changing. I won't go into the reasons why.

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MCGARRY: We will have not any time left for any more calls. Mr. Childs, thank you very much for being with us and Mrs. Wilson. And Betty, your plans for the future?

GROEBLI: Well, I want to thank you both very much too. I think it's been most enlightening and edifying as it turns out from two different points of view.